DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 159 974 HE 010 427

AUTHOR	Williamson, Carol
TITLE	Factors Possibly Influencing an Individual's Decision to Enroll in a SUN Course. Working Paper No. 7 [and] Executive Summary No. 7.
INSTITUTION	University of Mid-America, Lincoln, Nebr.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Aug 75
CONTRACT	NIE-G-75-001
NOTE	42p.; For related documents see HE 010 410 - HE 010 428
AVAILABLE FROM	Office of Public Affairs and Information Services, University of Mid-America, Box 82006, Lincoln, Nebraska 68501
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; Costs; Curriculum Evaluation; *Decision Making; *Delivery Systems; Educational Demand; Educational Television; *Enrollment Influences; Failure Factors; Higher Education; Institutional Research; Marketing; Nontraditional Students; *Open Education; Program Evaluation; Research Projects; *Student Application; *Telecourses; Television Research
IDENTIFIERS	State University of Nebraska; *University of Mid America NE

ABSTRACT

The enrollment of learners is significant to the State University of Nebraska (SUN) and the University of Mid-America (UMA). SUN is the pilot state delivery system and UMA is the regional course development, delivery coordination, and research agency; both view current enrollment as an indicator of future response to courses developed by the UMA consortium. This report examines the fact that four spring 1975 telecourses enrolled 351 fewer individuals than did two fall 1974 courses. Factors considered in this working paper and executive summary include: cost of tuition and course materials; awareness of educational opportunities; reputation of the sponsoring institution, industry, or community group; perceived worth or value of an education; courses or educational offerings; entrance qualifications and self-concept; and availability and accessibility of educational offering. Each of these factors is examined individually and a probable explanation is offered of the influence that factor had on a person's decision to enroll or not enroll in a SUN course. It is concluded that the factors to be addressed first by UMA are cost, promotion, and course needs. (LBH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED159974

FACTORS POSSIBLY INFLUENCING AN INDIVIDUAL'S DECISION TO ENROLL IN A SUN COURSE

Executive Summary No. 7

Office of
Research and Evaluation

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

HE 010 427

Carol Williamson
University of Mid-America

August, 1975

This report was prepared pursuant to Grant #NIE-G-75-001 from the National Institute of Education to the University of Mid-America. This report does not necessarily represent the view of that agency.

This paper has been prepared as a Summary of work on this topic. For elaboration of the work summarized herein, the reader is urged to consult Working Paper #7. Working Papers may be obtained by writing the Office of Public Affairs and Information Services, P. O. Box 82006, Lincoln, Nebraska, 68501.

FACTORS POSSIBLY INFLUENCING AN INDIVIDUAL'S DECISION
TO ENROLL IN A SUN COURSE

Introduction

The enrollment of learners is of the utmost importance to the State University of Nebraska (SUN) and to the University of Mid-America (UMA). SUN, the pilot state delivery system, and UMA, the regional course development, delivery coordination and research agency, are different organizations, but their functions and concerns are highly interdependent. At the heart of the concern of both organizations is success, which might be determined in part by economic survival and service. One indicator of the service SUN/UMA hopes to provide for adults in Nebraska is the number of students enrolled in course offerings. Current enrollment is viewed by some as an indicator of future response to courses developed by the UMA consortium. Number of students enrolled is also a frequent external criterion of "success" and, indeed, has been mentioned within SUN/UMA as one such criterion. Then too, the income that directly results from enrollments is critical to the financial stability of SUN and UMA. The enrollment difference between Fall, 1974, and Spring, 1975, for SUN course offerings thus prompts thoughtful exploration. Because the exploration made in this paper occurs after only two SUN course delivery periods, some caution should be urged against drawing definitive conclusions from such a limited enrollment experience.

As the first SUN delivery began (Fall, 1974), a total of 714 individuals were enrolled--427 for Accounting I and 287 for Introductory Psychology. When the Spring, 1975, courses began, 127 people had enrolled for Accounting I (a difference of 300 from the Fall), while 90 signed for Introductory Psychology

(a difference of 197 from the Fall). Two new courses, Consumer Experience and Making It Count, enrolled 75 and 71, respectively. Thus, total Spring enrollments numbered 363. The fact that the four Spring offerings enrolled 351 fewer individuals than did the two Fall courses raises a number of important questions.

For the purpose of this paper, this enrollment difference is explored from the perspective of the individual considering enrolling in a SUN course. That is, what are the factors that an individual considers when deciding whether or not to pursue SUN courses? An examination of enrollment from this perspective may yield useful insights into why the level of enrollment changed as it did.

Seven influential factors warrant consideration. They are as follows:

- cost of tuition and course materials
- awareness of educational opportunities
- reputation of the sponsoring institution, industry or community group
- perceived worth or value of an education
- courses or educational offerings
- entrance qualifications and self-concept
- availability and accessibility of educational offerings.

All of these factors, and perhaps others, may to some degree influence enrollments. Some of these factors may be amenable to manipulation or control by UMA or SUN, while others appear outside the influence of the organization. These seven factors are general considerations (ones that may influence a decision to enroll at Harvard, San Francisco State, Omaha METRO Community College, or SUN). It may be beneficial to examine each factor as it directly relates to SUN.

The remainder of the full report addresses each of the seven enrollment factors. The author sets forth an assertion about each enrollment factor. Each assertion is a probable explanation of the influence that factor had

on individuals' decisions to enroll or not enroll in a SUN course. A discussion section follows each assertion, elaborating upon the specific enrollment factor in question. The discussion of each factor concludes with suggestions for how the assertions offered might be explored for verification or rejection. For the purpose of this executive summary, however, the assertions are stated, followed by a brief review of the discussion and suggestion sections.

Cost

Assertion: Given uncertain economic times, the cost of SUN courses and course materials discourages enrollment.

The national economic scene reflects the combined effects of recession and inflation. One can assume that during times of economic uncertainty, even those for whom education is a key to financial stability may not participate, or may delay a decision to enroll in educational experiences. It is possible that depressing national and local economic news delayed people from enrolling in the Spring, 1975, SUN course offerings.

Against a backdrop of economic uncertainty, consider the change in SUN course costs. The increase in tuition and material costs between the Fall and Spring offerings of Accounting I and Introductory Psychology is substantial. Costs for Accounting I credit enrollees increased 13%, while non-credit costs increased 53%. Costs for Introductory Psychology credit enrollees increased 7%, while non-credit costs increased 43%.

The differential between Spring, 1975, credit and non-credit costs may account for the fact that a greater percentage of learners enrolled for credit in Spring, 1975, offerings than in Fall, 1974. Increase in course costs, whether credit or non-credit, between Fall, 1974, and Spring, 1975, may well have priced some students out of a SUN course.

What kinds of information might inform the supposition that SUN course costs discourage enrollment? First, a questionnaire has been sent to some 700 people who inquired about Spring course offerings but who did not subsequently enroll. (See UMA Working Paper #6, "An Exploration Into Reasons For Non-Enrollment in SUN Courses After Requesting Information about SUN") Two items on this questionnaire refer to course costs. Twenty-two percent (22%) of the 365 individuals responding (some 80 individuals) selected the high cost of tuition as the single most important reason for not enrolling, while 7% (some 26 individuals) chose the high cost of the instructional kit as the most important reason.

Second, and closely related to the aforementioned questionnaire, is the information provided from a market survey done by Selection Research, Inc. (SRI) for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Division in March, 1975. Results indicate that any educational activity cost above $40.00 would tend to eliminate 69%, a sizeable majority, of the credit-oriented group. In the same survey, it was found that any non-credit cost above $40.00 would tend to eliminate 87% of the non-credit oriented population.

Third, we should examine enrollment trends and costs between Fall, 1974, and Spring, 1975, in programs whose target population is comparable to SUN's. This might mean looking at correspondence/independent study programs, community college adult education offerings, University Without Walls enrollments, and similar outreach programs.

Finally, the availability of financial aid for part-time students is always worthy of consideration. This is a particularly difficult point, for in many instances state legislation does not permit financial aid for part-time students. Related to student aid are the possibilities of deferred payments, student loans and refunds for used instructional materials. If SUN is unable to lower course costs, then steps should be taken to ease course

costs. Mechanisms need to be explored for deferring tuition payments and purchasing used instructional materials. The cost for non-credit tuition, in particular, needs to be reviewed. These procedures and changes then need to be clearly communicated to potential learners.

The complex issue of costs for SUN tuition and instructional materials must be addressed immediately. Related to this issue is the need for increasing student financial aid and easing course costs.

Awareness of Educational Opportunities

Assertion: Many potential SUN enrollees do not know about SUN. Many who did know had insufficient time to make a decision to enroll.

Prior to enrolling in a sponsored education activity, adults must have some knowledge of the activity and its meaningfulness. Various institutions and community agencies have been about the business of "advertising" their educational endeavors for some time. In recent years, with increased competition for learners, public relations efforts have been stepped up and a great deal of educational "advertising" currently appears in the various media. Where previously only a few educational agencies actively marketed their wares, now many do so.

Increasing numbers of institutions are now turning their attention to those adults not presently served by traditional programs. Attention to new kinds of learners, along with increased public relations efforts, may be creating a situation where the public is finding it more difficult to make choices among educational opportunities.

A very real possibility exists that SUN information, in addition to competing with information on other educational opportunities, simply did not get out to the consumer. SUN public relations efforts have capitalized on free space in newspapers, free radio and television time, promotional

brochures and personal contacts. It is probable that large numbers of Nebraskans still do not know about SUN or, if they do, may still be uncertain of how SUN fits their needs.

The timing of promotional efforts must also be considered. The single factor that delayed Spring recruitment efforts was the uncertainty of continued federal funding for SUN and UMA. Although funding decisions may not impact as greatly on future recruitment campaigns, it is reasonable to believe that they had an adverse effect on getting the word out for this Spring's offerings. Both advance promotional work and the reaching of a greater proportion of Nebraskans are important considerations for the future.

What kinds of information might constitute public relations and advance promotion of SUN course offerings? The survey to individuals who requested SUN information but did not subsequently enroll is informative. Thirteen percent (13%) of those responding (some 47 individuals) selected lack of lead time as the most important reason for not enrolling. Learning center staff, who engage in a great deal of personal contact for promotional efforts, support the contention that not enough time existed in the last recruitment campaign. An exploration of promotion techniques used by other learning programs would be informative. Perhaps SUN has used channels of communication which have missed a significant portion of potential participants in non-traditional study programs. There is certainly reason to experiment further with promotional avenues that have appeared to be successful in SUN's limited experience, as well as to try other kinds of promotion activities.

Another area that must be investigated is how to effectively communicate the idea of continuous enrollment. SUN needs to think of ways to advise people of continuous enrollment, and of ways to remove the perceived constraints of having to watch the broadcast television component.

The many dimensions of SUN public information require continuous

scrutiny. The timing of public relations efforts, the various communication channels used, and the effective translation of the SUN concept are aspects deserving particular attention.

Reputation of the Sponsoring Agency

Assertion: As a new entity SUN has yet to establish credibility and may thus be ignored in comparison to well-established educational organizations.

It takes time for any new idea or organization to take hold. Although time is a factor in establishing a reputation, there are other considerations as well. One such consideration is the "success" of the organization's service. For SUN/UMA, "success" has numerous interpretations, uppermost of which is the judgment passed by involved learners. Learner's opinions of SUN/UMA will be based on the quality of courses, the satisfaction derived from course participation, and the extent to which personal goals are addressed. The opinions of those not directly involved with SUN/UMA are also crucial. For example, the views of legislators and professional colleagues, based on the quality and need for the services performed by SUN/UMA, will go a long way toward establishing a reputation for SUN and continued support for an open learning system.

SUN has been both the beneficiary and the victim of press coverage. Interpreting SUN to the public is not alone the task of the press. Thus, one of the first, and continuing, activities for SUN is to think of ways to influence the accuracy of press reports and general information. Equally important is the need to get the SUN story out to the citizens via enrolled learners and personal contacts, such as high school guidance counselors, local media personnel, and industrial newsletters.

A second activity might be for SUN to explore ways of using state and local learning center councils not only as advisory panels but also as plan-

ning boards for SUN activities. To date, not enough thought has been given to the effective use of such councils, both for building SUN credibility and for using the ideas and talents of the council members.

A third important means by which SUN and UMA can gain trust and support is to build bridges, both philosophically and operationally, with existing educational programs concerned with nontraditional approaches to learning. Alternative plans to involve interested faculty and staff in cooperative outreach programs need to be carefully thought through.

Interpreting SUN to Nebraska, involving SUN learner and advisory councils in planning, working with other educators, and producing high quality educational offerings are concurrent and urgent activities.

Perceived Value of Educational Opportunity

Assertion: Even though market surveys indicated that significant numbers of Nebraskans would be interested in SUN-type courses as an avenue to educational opportunities, there are numerous circumstances that interfere with potential learners becoming actual enrollees.

There are numerous ways to inquire into the value an individual attaches to an educational opportunity. One of these ways is to survey target populations for their interest and/or willingness to engage in a venture like SUN. Three such market surveys were conducted as a part of SUN and UMA planning efforts. Their results were remarkably consistent with one another. Basically, these studies indicated that some 20,000 adults in the population over 21 years of age would be potential learners in SUN-type courses. In addition, some 2,000 high school juniors and seniors would be potential learners. Even though these individuals responded with interest to the SUN concept, financial and/or life circumstances may prevent them from enrolling even if they know of the opportunity to enroll.

It would be advisable to re-examine enrollment expectations based on survey projections. This could include further analysis of the assumptions underlying the economic model prepared by the Esmee Fairbairn Economic Research Centre.

One dimension of a study on completion and non-completion in existing SUN courses will inquire into the reasons for first offering enrollees not re-enrolling. The point here is that SUN may not be building a pool of interested learners, or perhaps does not, at this point in time, have offerings that respond to learner needs.

It could well be that SUN information does not adequately portray the humanizing elements brought to each course by faculty contact and learning center activities. Since market surveys indicated lack of student-teacher contact and distance from a learning center as possible reasons for not enrolling, these elements of the SUN concept may need more adequate explanation.

It would also be beneficial to investigate the numbers enrolling in other young nontraditional programs and the ways these programs are going about making enrollment projections. Such investigations must proceed with enrollment comparisons in mind, but also with the differences between programs clearly defined.

A comparison of SUN with other innovative programs should include more than just enrollments. A discussion with staff from South Carolina ETV, although brief, did point to directions SUN might take for establishing cooperative relationships with existing institutions, for employing various promotion techniques, for investigating the advantages of offering graduate course credit, for exploring the area of teacher education, for establishing course costs, and so forth.

Enrollment comparisons and the unique dimensions of other innovative educational programs are important sources of information for SUN and UMA. In addition, because the issues of economic feasibility and service to learners are of primary importance, SUN and UMA must continually explore the complex issue of realistic enrollment projections.

Course Offerings

Assertion: Currently, SUN course offerings do not respond to the needs of a significantly large number of learners.

Courses offered are closely related to the purposes of SUN. If the intent is to provide content equivalent to the first two years of college, the implications for course offerings are different than if SUN intends to respond to continuing professional education needs. Likewise, there are significant differences in purpose if SUN wishes to offer courses in practical areas such as human relations, personal health, child rearing and personal finance. What adults want to learn and how these desires match SUN's purpose require further consideration.

The survey of reasons for non-enrollment reveals that 8% indicated non-interest in the courses offered was their most important reason for not enrolling. The courses of interest then listed by these same individuals indicated interest in practical courses as opposed to traditional academic areas of interest. Similar demands for practical courses have been recognized by learning center staff in their personal contacts with learners and potential learners.

UMA, and in turn SUN, will surely benefit from other states in the consortium monitoring the needs of potential learners. However, no matter how much information on learner needs exists, UMA and the state delivery systems must first come to grips with organizational goals and the most

effective ways in which to implement these goals. Once the courses that serve learner needs, as well as the goals of SUN and UMA, are determined, the second area on which attention needs to be focused is that of the usually inadvertant duplication of existing educational offerings.

A third consideration is that individuals have an opportunity to participate in some aspects of each currently offered SUN program without actually enrolling. This participation includes watching television broadcasts as well as reading the weekly newspaper component. It may be that a significant portion of the population considers these two components as sufficient sources of information for their purposes.

Finally, SUN must be reasonable about the life span of each course offered, and must keep in mind that the pool of interested learners will diminish over each repeated offering of a course.

More accurate definitions of learner needs, the duplication of existing educational offerings, the benefits derived from only television and newspaper participation in SUN courses, and the life span of courses offered are critical issues for both SUN and UMA.

Admissions Criteria and Course Flexibility

Assertion: SUN currently operates with an open admissions policy and with self-paced learning. This very openness and flexibility may raise uncertainties among potential learners regarding their ability for and mastery of the work required. Potential enrollees may not understand the learner support system being developed and implemented.

From the beginning SUN/UMA has focused on reducing barriers to educational opportunities. Such barriers to learning include admissions criteria, on-campus or classroom instruction, travel, rigid classroom schedules, and so forth. Those surveyed on their interest in SUN-type courses commented that appealing aspects of this type of delivery included the convenience of

time and location, the fact that jobs need not be interrupted while earning credit, self-pacing, and less pressure than exists during on-campus classes. However, a primary target population for SUN/UMA courses is composed of individuals who have been away from formal education, or who have experienced limited success in educational endeavors. It may be that the needs of these potential learners would include a more careful articulation of the SUN/UMA commitment to availing individuals of remedial work, help in developing study skills, reinforcement for work completed, or other aspects of academic guidance.

The discussion section indicates that the flexibility of the SUN/UMA course structure should be carefully examined as it relates to the competencies and expectations of many potential learners. Scheduling and pacing need to be carefully explored in relation to the needs of the primary target population. In addition, the role of learning centers and faculty and staff must be thoughtfully planned, and concern for the success of potential learners explicitly communicated.

Summary and Recommendations

Seven influential enrollment factors have been described and their relationship to the SUN/UMA open learning program analyzed. Although these enrollment factors interact with one another in varying degrees depending on individual circumstances, for the purposes of this explanation they have been set forth as distinct areas of inquiry. It must be recognized that there are unique life circumstances beyond the control of SUN and UMA that prohibit an individual from enrolling. However, certain factors influencing enrollment are within the control of SUN/UMA and should be viewed as priority policy issues in the near future.

It is thus recommended that now is the appropriate time for SUN, in cooperation with the UMA Office of Research and Evaluation, to undertake

a study of factors influencing enrollment. In the author's opinion, those factors that should be addressed first are cost, promotion and course needs. Continuation of these investigations should result in some thoughtful policy decisions for future enrollment activities.

FACTORS POSSIBLY INFLUENCING AN INDIVIDUAL'S DECISION TO ENROLL IN A SUN COURSE

Working Paper No. 7

Office of
Research and Evaluation

Carol Williamson
University of Mid-America

June, 1975

This report was prepared pursuant to Grant #NIE-G-75-001 from the National Institute of Education to the University of Mid-America. This report does not necessarily represent the view of NIE.

Additional copies of this report may be obtained from the Office of Public Affairs and Information Services, University of Mid-America, Box 82006, Lincoln, NE., 68501.

FACTORS POSSIBLY INFLUENCING AN INDIVIDUAL'S DECISION TO ENROLL IN A SUN COURSE

Introduction

The enrollment of learners is of the utmost importance to the State University of Nebraska (SUN) and to the University of Mid-America (UMA). SUN, the pilot state delivery system, and UMA, the regional course development, delivery coordination and research agency, are different organizations, but their functions and concerns are highly interdependent. At the heart of the concern of both organizations is success, which might be determined in part by economic survival and service. One indicator of the service SUN/UMA hopes to provide for adults in Nebraska is the number of students enrolled in course offerings. Current enrollment is viewed by some as an indicator of future response to courses developed by the UMA consortium. Number of students enrolled is also a frequent external criterion of "success" and, indeed, has been mentioned within SUN/UMA as one such criterion. Then too, the income that directly results from enrollments is critical to the financial stability of SUN and UMA. The enrollment difference between Fall, 1974, and Spring, 1975, for SUN course offerings thus prompts thoughtful exploration. Because the exploration made in this paper occurs after only two SUN course delivery periods, some caution should be urged against drawing definitive conclusions from such a limited enrollment experience.

As the first SUN delivery began (Fall, 1974), a total of 714 individuals were enrolled--427 for Accounting I and 287 for Introductory Psychology. When the Spring, 1975, courses began, 127 people had enrolled for Accounting I (a difference of 300 from the Fall), while 90 signed for Introductory Psychology

(a difference of 197 from the Fall). Two new courses, Consumer Experience and Making It Count, enrolled 75 and 71, respectively. Thus, total Spring enrollments numbered 363. The fact that the four Spring offerings enrolled 351 fewer individuals than did the two Fall courses raises a number of important questions.

For the purpose of this paper, this enrollment difference is explored from the perspective of the individual considering enrolling in a SUN course. That is, what are the factors that an individual considers when deciding whether or not to pursue SUN courses? An examination of enrollment from this perspective may yield useful insights into why the level of enrollment changed as it did.

Seven influential factors warrant consideration. They are as follows:

- cost of tuition and course materials
- awareness of educational opportunities
- reputation of the sponsoring institution, industry or community group
- perceived worth or value of an education
- courses or educational offerings
- entrance qualifications and self-concept
- availability and accessibility of educational offerings.

All of these factors, and perhaps others, may to some degree influence enrollments. Some of these factors may be amenable to manipulation or control by UMA or SUN, while others appear outside the influence of the organization. These seven factors are general considerations (ones that may influence a decision to enroll at Harvard, San Francisco State, Omaha METRO Community College, or SUN). It may be beneficial to examine each factor as it directly relates to SUN.

The remainder of this report addresses each of the seven enrollment factors. The author has chosen to set forth an assertion about each

enrollment factor. Each assertion is a probable explanation of the influence that factor had on individuals' decisions to enroll or not enroll in a SUN course. A discussion section follows each assertion, elaborating upon the specific enrollment factor in question. The discussion of each factor concludes with suggestions for how the assertions offered might be explored for verification or rejection.

Cost

Assertion: Given uncertain economic times, the cost of SUN courses and course materials discourages enrollment.

Discussion

It can be argued that education for some individuals is a means to obtain economic stability and status, while for others education is a "luxury." It is risky to project what proportion of a given population favors the necessity or luxury points of view. One can assume, however, that during times of economic uncertainty, even those for whom education is a key to financial stability may not participate, or may delay a decision to enroll in educational experiences. It is possible that depressing national and local economic news delayed people from enrolling in the Spring, 1975, SUN course offerings.

The national economic situation is intensified by a period of combined recession and inflation. Current national publications now feature "recession notes"--including commentaries on the visible consequences of slumping business and soaring prices; articles highlighting comparisons between the current economic slump and conditions of the 1930's; headlines reading "Long Recession is Forecast" and "Recession Starts Taking Toll." To the economist the terms "recession/depression" are matters of scientific

inquiry; to the average citizen the terms may be interchangeable. Many folks agree that they are in the midst of hard economic times.

In Nebraska, the Fall, 1974, news spoke of a "sluggish economy" and of "economic gloom" in the Great Plains. In March, 1975, headlines read, "State is in 'Real Recession.'" On the other hand, one can also read that the state's economy is sound, that Nebraska is far from being in an economic tailspin, and that December retail sales figures were "much less depressing than they were for the month of November." Such conflicting reports draw attention to the prevailing economic uncertainty. Nebraskans seem to be attuned to the national scene and sense an economic conservatism nationally as well as at the state level. All of this might imply that, while the Fall, 1974, delivery of SUN courses occurred when Nebraska was relatively "untouched" by recessionary factors, the second delivery coincided with strong indications that the state was in the midst of a recession of some magnitude.

Against this backdrop of economic uncertainty, consider the change in SUN course costs, as presented in Table 1. The increase in tuition and material costs between the Fall and Spring offerings of Accounting I and Introductory Psychology is substantial. Costs for Accounting I credit enrollees increased 13%, while non-credit costs increased 53%. Costs for Introductory Psychology credit enrollees increased 7%, while non-credit costs increased 43%.

The differential between Spring, 1975, credit and non-credit costs may account for the fact that a greater percentage of learners enrolled for credit in Spring, 1975, offerings than in Fall, 1974. Increase in course costs, whether credit or non-credit, between Fall, 1974, and Spring, 1975,

Table 1. SUN Course Costs - Fall 1974/Spring 1975

		Fall 1974 Enrollment	Tuition	Materials	Total	Spring 1975 Enrollment	Tuition	Materials	Total
Accounting	Credit	280	$54	$16	$70*	103	$54	$25	$79[c]
	Non-credit	130	27	16	43*	19	40.50	25	65.60
		410[a]				127			
Psychology	Credit	215	54	16	70	81	54	21	75
	Non-credit	50	27	16	43	9	40.50	21	61.50
		265[b]				90			
Consumer		Not offered			Credit	62	54	19	73
					Non-credit	13	40.50	19	59.50
						75			
Computer		Not offered			Credit	58	36	20	56
					Non-credit	13	27	20	47
						71			

*Add $23 for audio tape recorder for enrollees who ordered one.

[a]17 enrollees withdrew during the first eight weeks and received a refund on tuition and materials

[b]22 enrollees withdrew during the first eight weeks and received a refund on tuition and materials

[c]state tax must be added in Spring, 1975, costs

may well have priced some students out of a SUN course.

Further Analysis

What kinds of information might inform the supposition that SUN course costs discourage enrollment? First, a questionnaire has been sent to some 700 people who inquired about Spring course offerings but who did not subsequently enroll. (See UMA Working Paper #6, "An Exploration Into Reasons For Non-Enrollment in SUN Courses After Requesting Information about SUN") To date, 365 useable responses have been received. Two items on this questionnaire refer to course costs. Thirty-six percent (36%) of those responding indicated that one of their reasons for not enrolling was the high cost of tuition, while 17% indicated that the cost of the instructional kit was too high. Furthermore, 22% of the 365 individuals responding (some 80 individuals) selected the high cost of tuition as the single most important reason for not enrolling, while 7% (some 26 individuals) chose the high cost of the instructional kit as the most important reason. SUN and UMA must consider the impact of course costs as a deterrent to enrollment.

Second, and closely related to the aforementioned questionnaire, is the information provided from a market survey done by Selection Research, Inc. (SRI) for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Division in March, 1975. The details of the sample and findings of the study are not included here. However, it is informative to note that respondents were asked the amount each would be willing to spend to take a course or educational activity for credit. Results indicate that any per activity cost above $40.00 would tend to eliminate 69%, a sizeable majority, of the credit-oriented group. Likewise, non-credit activities apparently command even less dollars than credit activities. In the same survey, it was found that any

non-credit cost above $40.00 would tend to eliminate 87% of the non-credit oriented population. The implications of this study for SUN/UMA are noteworthy and must also be considered.

Third, we should examine enrollment trends and costs between Fall, 1974, and Spring, 1975, in programs whose target population is comparable to SUN's. This might mean looking at correspondence/independent study programs, community college adult education offerings, University Without Walls enrollments, and similar outreach programs.

For example, a recent publication from the University of Nebraska Extension Division indicates that college independent study by correspondence enrolled 181 individuals for March, 1975. March enrollments are of particular interest to SUN because March was the target month for enrolling students for the second delivery of SUN courses. In conversation with an extension division staff member, it was pointed out that the independent study enrollment figure of 181 is an increase of some 37 enrollees over March a year ago. It should be noted that UNL independent study draws enrollments from all over the nation and occasionally from students studying abroad. Thus, the pool of potential learners is considerably greater than in the state of Nebraska alone, and may well be influenced by economic factors not found in Nebraska. It is also interesting to note that extension division staff attribute increased enrollment to the current economic dilemma. Their experience indicates that during difficult economic times individuals look to education to upgrade job performance and increase job stability, and that independent study allows enough flexibility so income from jobs is not affected. In addition, independent study by

correspondence allows individuals already enrolled full-time the option of maintaining their enrollment status while freeing some time for employment. Independent study also allows an individual to try out college-level courses without investing great sums of money or a total commitment of time away from employment.

Information on and explanations about enrollment trends and their possible relation to cost factors in other Nebraska institutions, as well as from the nation at large, will provide a basis of comparison for SUN.

Finally, the availability of financial aid for part-time students is always worthy of consideration. SUN should explore every means possible for providing scholarship money, and for informing potential learners of employee tuition benefits, veterans and vocational rehabilitation tuition benefits and other sources of financial support. This is a particularly difficult point, for in many instances state legislation does not permit financial aid for part-time students. Related to student aid are the possibilities of deferred payments, student loans and refunds for used instructional materials. If SUN is unable to lower course costs, then steps should be taken to ease course costs. Mechanisms need to be explored for deferring tuition payments and purchasing used instructional materials. The cost for non-credit tuition, in particular, needs to be reviewed. These procedures and changes then need to be clearly communicated to potential learners.

In summary, the complex issue of costs for SUN tuition and instructional materials must be addressed immediately. Related to this issue is the need for increasing student financial aid and easing course costs.

Awareness of Educational Opportunities

Assertion: Many potential SUN enrollees do not know about SUN. Many who did know had insufficient time to make a decision to enroll.

Discussion

Prior to enrolling in a sponsored educational activity, adults must have some knowledge of the activity and its meaningfulness. Various institutions and community agencies have been about the business of "advertising" their educational endeavors for some time. In recent years, with increased competition for learners, public relations efforts have been stepped up and a great deal of educational "advertising" currently appears in the various media. Where previously only a few educational agencies actively marketed their wares, now many do so.

Increasing numbers of institutions are now turning their attention to those adults not presently served by traditional programs. Evidence of this attention is apparent in a report of enrollment trends for part-time students, appearing in the November 11, 1974, issue of The Chronicle of Higher Education. Part-time enrollments for Fall, 1974, increased 4.8% at four year institutions and 11.3% at two year schools. Attention to new kinds of learners, along with increased public relations efforts, may be creating a situation where the public is finding it more difficult to make choices among educational opportunities.

A very real possibility exists that SUN information, in addition to competing with information on other educational opportunities, simply did not get out to the consumer. SUN public relations efforts have capitalized on free space in newspapers, free radio and television time, promotional brochures and personal contacts. It is probable that large numbers of

Nebraskans still do not know about SUN or, if they do, may still be uncertain of how SUN fits their needs.

The timing of promotional efforts must also be considered. Public relations efforts directly related to the Fall, 1974, recruitment began the previous July, at least three months in advance of course start-ups. An in depth campaign for Spring, 1975, was not mounted until early February, about four weeks before course starting dates. This late promotion was far from the original intentions of those responsible for public relations and recruitment activities.

The single factor that delayed Spring recruitment efforts was the uncertainty of continued federal funding for SUN and UMA. This uncertainty was, of course, followed by a February public announcement of continued UMA funding, but advance public relations was thus considerably delayed. Although funding decisions may not impact as greatly on future recruitment campaigns, it is reasonable to believe that they had an adverse effect on getting the word out for this Spring's offerings. Both advance promotional work and the reaching of a greater proportion of Nebraskans are important considerations for the future.

Further Analysis

What kinds of information might constitute public relations and advance promotion of SUN course offerings? The survey to individuals who requested SUN information but did not subsequently enroll is informative. Twenty-two percent (22%) of those responding indicated that the lack of advanced time to make a decision to enroll contributed to their not doing so. Thirteen percent (13%) of those responding (some 47 individuals) selected lack of lead time as the most important reason for not enrolling.

Learning center staff, who engage in a great deal of personal contact for promotional efforts, support the contention that not enough time existed in the last recruitment campaign. These staff members must be involved more closely with plans for promotion. They already have some strong indicators of what works, and why, in enlisting the interest of potential learners.

An exploration of promotion techniques used by other learning programs would be informative. How, for instance, does business promote workshops and seminars? What has been tried and proven successful for extension programs, Empire State, Omaha METRO Community College, Miami-Dade, or Coast Community College District? Perhaps SUN has used channels of communication which have missed a significant portion of potential participants in nontraditional study programs. There is certainly reason to experiment further with promotional avenues that have appeared to be successful in SUN's limited experience, as well as to try other kinds of promotion activities.

Another area that must be investigated is how to effectively communicate the idea of continuous enrollment. Could it be that many learners assume that if they do not begin with the public broadcast of the television component they are automatically and hopelessly behind in the material? If so, this notion could discourage folks from enrolling and proceeding according to their own schedule. SUN needs to think of ways to advise people of this issue, and of ways to remove the perceived constraints of having to watch the broadcast television component.

In summary, the many dimensions of SUN public information require close continuous scrutiny. The timing of public relations efforts, the various

communication channels used, and the effective translation of the SUN concept are aspects deserving particular attention.

Reputation of the Sponsoring Agency

Assertion: As a new entity SUN has yet to establish credibility and may thus be ignored in comparison to well-established educational organizations.

Discussion

It takes time for any new idea or organization to take hold. Staff, because of their enthusiasm and commitment to the goals of open learning, are naturally anxious to have SUN and UMA accepted as credible organizations. Although time is a factor in establishing a reputation, there are other considerations as well.

One such consideration is the "success" of the organization's service. For SUN/UMA, "success" has numerous interpretations, uppermost of which is the judgment passed by involved learners. Learner's opinions of SUN/UMA will be based on the quality of courses, the satisfaction derived from course participation, and the extent to which personal goals are addressed. Given a good experience with SUN offerings, learners will be inclined to encourage others to participate, and conversely, given a bad experience, learners will be inclined to advise others not to participate.

The opinions of those not directly involved with SUN/UMA are also crucial. For example, the views of legislators and professional colleagues, based on the quality and need for the services performed by SUN/UMA, will go a long way toward establishing a reputation for SUN and continued support for an open learning system.

Further Analysis

SUN has been both the beneficiary and the victim of press coverage. Much good and accurate information has been reported in local news sources.

On the other hand, the message has been confusing on the differences between SUN and UMA, especially relative to the funding base of each. The experimental nature of SUN, and the recent discussions about SUN funding, may have affected Spring enrollments. Interpreting SUN to the public is not alone the task of the press. Thus, one of the first, and continuing, activities for SUN is to think of ways to influence the accuracy of press reports and general information. Equally important is the need to get the SUN story out to the citizens via enrolled learners and personal contacts, such as high school guidance counselors, local media personnel, and industrial newsletters. All of these activities require significant amounts of time and some delay before fruition.

Learners, as defined in this paper, include both those enrolled and potential enrollees. An already existing SUN state advisory council and advisory councils for the learning centers are important mechanisms for influencing public opinion. A second activity might be for SUN to explore ways of using these councils not only as advisory panels but also as planning boards for SUN activities. To date, not enough thought has been given to the effective use of such councils, both for building SUN credibility and for using the ideas and talents of the council members.

A third important means by which SUN and UMA can gain trust and support is to build bridges, both philosophically and operationally, with existing educational programs concerned with nontraditional approaches to learning. Alternative plans to involve interested faculty and staff in cooperative outreach programs need to be carefully thought through.

In summary, interpreting SUN to Nebraska, involving SUN learner and advisory councils in planning, working with other educators, and producing

high quality educational offerings are concurrent and urgent activities.

Perceived Value of Educational Opportunity

Assertion: Even though market surveys indicated that significant numbers of Nebraskans would be interested in SUN-type courses as an avenue to educational opportunities, there are numerous circumstances that interfere with potential learners becoming actual enrollees.

Discussion

There are numerous ways to inquire into the value an individual attaches to an educational opportunity. One of these ways is to survey target populations for their interest and/or willingness to engage in a venture like SUN. Such surveys are not an attempt to predict how many will actually enroll, but rather to answer the question of whether there are significant numbers of people (in Nebraska) to whom the program appeals and who might therefore be potential registrants. Three such market surveys were conducted as a part of planning efforts. Their results were remarkably consistent with one another. Basically, these studies indicated that some 20,000 adults in the population over 21 years of age would be potential learners in SUN-type courses. In addition, some 2,000 high school juniors and seniors would be potential learners. Even though these individuals responded with interest to the SUN concept, financial and/or life circumstances may prevent them from enrolling even if they know of the opportunity to enroll. Thus, one can expect a considerable difference between potential and actual learners, or to put it differently, between felt and expressed needs of learners, and actions they are able or willing to take in response to those needs.

Further Analysis

It would be accurate to say that learners have not responded to the second delivery of SUN courses in the numbers anticipated by SUN staff. Maybe SUN expectations were inappropriately raised by market survey findings. Or perhaps response to the first course offerings was misleading. It might be that enrollment in the Fall courses reflected interest by individuals more curious about an innovative approach to learning than by individuals interested in coursework itself. Somehow we must work at realistically translating potential expressions of learner interest into more accurate enrollment projections.

It would be advisable to re-examine enrollment expectations based on survey projections. This could include further analysis of the assumptions underlying the economic model prepared by the Esmee Fairbairn Economic Research Centre.

One dimension of a study on completion and non-completion in existing SUN courses will inquire into the reasons for first offering enrollees not re-enrolling. The point here is that SUN may not be building a pool of interested learners, or perhaps does not, at this point in time, have offerings that respond to learner needs.

It could well be that SUN information does not adequately portray the humanizing elements brought to each course by faculty contact and learning center activities. Since market surveys indicated lack of student-teacher contact and distance from a learning center as possible reasons for not enrolling, these elements of the SUN concept may need more adequate explanation.

It would also be beneficial to investigate the numbers enrolling in other young nontraditional programs and the ways these programs are going about making enrollment projections. Such investigations must proceed with enrollment comparisons in mind, but also with the differences between programs clearly defined.

For example, contact with staff for the South Carolina ETV Network reveals some interesting enrollment figures and some real differences between their program and SUN's. Six courses were offered over open circuit SCETV in Fall, 1974, five of these for the first time. Four of these courses were offered again in Spring, 1975. Enrollments were as follows:

	Fall, 1974	Spring, 1975
Education	74	not offered
Teacher as Manager (graduate level)	196	504
Readings (Education	30	22
American Government	26	32
Government	29	not offered
History	47	40

These figures represent individuals who enrolled for the open circuit offerings and who took the course at home, much like the format experienced by SUN learners. Comparisons between the South Carolina and SUN enrollments must be made with caution. However, at first glance, SUN enrollments of 714 in two courses (Fall) and 363 in four courses (Spring) compare favorably with the SCETV enrollments of 402 students for six courses (Fall) and 598 students for four courses (Spring). One must also keep in mind that South Carolina has a larger population density than Nebraska, a fact that increases the pool of potential learners. In addition, the largest enrollment for any one SCETV course was a graduate level offering (Teacher as Manager), an indication that SUN might want to consider the benefits of some service in the area of upper level coursework.

The SCETV courses are also offered on campus via closed circuit and in a classroom setting. Enrollments on campus are significantly higher. For example, the American Government course enrolled 475 for the Fall and 520 for the Spring. Registration for both open circuit and on campus enrollments are processed through the public institutions cooperating in this multi-media approach to education. The promotion of courses is also handled by individual institutions with some additional promotional information offered over television and in the ETV program guide.

A recent publication (College Credit Through Television, R. Carlisle, 1974) explores the broadcasting of college credit courses and reveals the following:

> The Kentucky Educational Television agency shared in the creation of a higher education consortium in Spring, 1973, and went on the air five months later with five credit courses. A total of 212 signed up for these courses through five of the participating institutions.
>
> The Maryland Center for Public Broadcasting's College of the Air experienced its best enrollments in Spring, 1974. At that time, its four televised undergraduate courses drew 510 credit seekers, its three teacher training series drew 42 individuals.

Again, a caution about enrollment comparisons is necessary. However, SUN enrollments appear to be comparable with the Kentucky enrollment of 212 students in five courses and the Maryland enrollment of 552 students in seven course offerings.

A comparison of SUN with other innovative programs should include more than just enrollments. The discussion with staff from South Carolina ETV, although brief, did point to directions SUN might take for establishing cooperative relationships with existing institutions, for employing various promotion techniques, for investigating the advantages of offering graduate

course credit, for exploring the area of teacher education, for establishing course costs, and so forth.

In summary, enrollment comparisons and the unique dimensions of other innovative educational programs are important sources of information for SUN and UMA. In addition, because the issues of economic feasibility and service to learners are of primary importance, SUN and UMA must continually explore the complex issue of realistic enrollment projections.

Course Offerings

Assertion: Currently, SUN course offerings do not respond to the needs of a significantly large number of learners.

Discussion

The three market surveys previously mentioned indicate interest in some specific courses. Interested learners ranked psychology and accounting among their top choices. The decision to develop accounting and to adapt an already existing psychology course was greatly influenced by these rankings. However, the selection of The Consumer Experience and Making It Count (introduction to computer science), was much more the result of availability of these two courses than any need expressed by potential learners.

Courses offered are closely related to the purposes of SUN. If the intent is to provide content equivalent to the first two years of college, the implications for course offerings are different than if SUN intends to respond to continuing professional education needs. Likewise, there are significant differences in purpose if SUN wishes to offer courses in practical areas such as human relations, personal health, child rearing and personal finance. What adults want to learn and how these desires match SUN's purpose require further consideration.

Further Analysis

The survey of reasons for non-enrollment reveals that a total of 14% checked non-interest in the courses offered as a reason for not enrolling in SUN Spring courses. Additionally, 8% indicated this was their most important reason for not enrolling. The courses of interest then listed by these same individuals do not fall into any particular pattern, but a goodly number of them are from the practical realm as opposed to traditional academic areas of interest.

Similar demands for practical courses have been recognized by learning center staff in their personal contacts with learners and potential learners. Learner interest in other than traditional academic offerings must be thought through by both SUN and UMA. UMA, and in turn SUN, will surely benefit from other states in the consortium monitoring the needs of potential learners. However, no matter how much information on learner needs exists, UMA and the state delivery systems must first come to grips with organizational goals and the most effective ways in which to implement these goals.

Once the courses that serve learner needs, as well as the goals of SUN and UMA, are determined, the second area on which attention needs to be focused is that of the usually inadvertant duplication of existing educational offerings.

For example, the SUN Consumer Experience course enrolled 75 individuals. And yet, Consumer Survival Kit, sponsored by public television and aired prior to and during the SUN Consumer course, has received over 850 requests for free materials. SUN appears to be competing with this public television consumer course, surely one possible reason for an apparent lack of

interest in the SUN offering. How widespread such competition is among other offerings is unknown but is undoubtedly an important factor.

A third consideration is that individuals have an opportunity to participate in some aspects of each currently offered SUN program without actually enrolling. This participation includes watching television broadcasts as well as reading the weekly newspaper component. Although at this time there is no indication of how many Nebraskans do so participate, it may be that a significant portion of the population considers these two components as sufficient sources of information for their purposes. On the other hand, SUN and UMA cannot discount the fact that a less than positive reaction to television and newspaper could bias some people against future enrollment. The study of reasons for non-enrollment does indicate the 6% of those responding consider watching the television segment as fulfilling their needs, while 3% decided after watching television broadcasts that the course was not really what they had in mind.

Finally, SUN must be reasonable about the life span of each course offered, and must keep in mind that the pool of interested learners will diminish over each repeated offering of a course. This fact speaks to the wisdom of "resting" an offering after every second or third consecutive presentation.

In summary, more accurate definitions of learner needs, the duplication of existing educational offerings, the benefits derived from only television and newspaper participation in SUN courses, and the life span of courses offered are critical issues for both SUN and UMA.

Admissions Criteria and Course Flexibility

Assertion: SUN currently operates with an open admissions policy and with self-paced learning. This very openness and flexibility may raise uncertainties among potential learners regarding their ability for and mastery of the work required. Potential enrollees may not understand the learner support system being developed and implemented.

Discussion

From the beginning SUN/UMA has focused on reducing barriers to educational opportunities. Such barriers to learning include admissions criteria, on-campus or classroom instruction, travel, rigid classroom schedules, and so forth. Those surveyed on their interest in SUN-type courses commented that appealing aspects of this type of delivery included the convenience of time and location, the fact that jobs need not be interrupted while earning credit, self-pacing, and less pressure than exists during on-campus classes. However, a primary target population for SUN/UMA courses is composed of individuals who have been away from formal education, or who have experienced limited success in educational endeavors. It may be that the needs of these potential learners would include a more careful articulation of the SUN/UMA commitment to availing individuals of remedial work, help in developing study skills, reinforcement for work completed, or other aspects of academic guidance.

Further Analysis

There are several indications that the flexibility built into SUN/UMA courses may be a deterrent to enrollment for some individuals. First, although television broadcasts for the Fall course offerings commenced on specific dates, learners were not discouraged from enrolling after the

start of broadcasts, and they were not prevented from proceeding at their own pace except in particular instances when course instructional materials were not available in final format. However, feedback for the Fall courses indicated that the television component is seen as a pacing device and that the pacing of the broadcasts was too fast for some. Students may have been somewhat discouraged from future enrollment by their inability to keep pace with the television lessons.

Second, in response to the feedback on pacing, additional breaks were inserted in the television broadcasts for the Spring offerings. These breaks added to the length of the formal delivery so that Spring courses continued into June and early July. There is some reason to suspect that continuation of courses into summer months and vacation times may have deterred some individuals from enrolling. However, only 6% of those who inquired about SUN but did not enroll chose the fact that courses continued into the summer as a reason for their not enrolling.

Individuals who completed the first offering of Accounting I and Introductory Psychology were asked to complete an end-of-course evaluation. Among other things, the interim report on these series itemizes factors selected as contributing to course difficulty. In Accounting I, the second most important factor relating to course difficulty was academic/learning problems. This was the <u>most important</u> factor selected by those who finished Introductory Psychology. Given that academic/learning problems were rated high by those completing coursework, it can be assumed that this problem is as significant, or even more so, for those who have not yet finished the course.

In summary, these points indicate that the flexibility of the SUN/UMA course structure should be carefully examined as it relates to the competencies and expectations of many potential learners. Scheduling and pacing need to be carefully explored in relation to the needs of the primary target population. In addition, the role of learning centers and faculty and staff must be thoughtfully planned, and concern for the success of potential learners explicitly communicated.

Summary and Recommendations

Seven influencial enrollment factors have been described and their relationship to the SUN/UMA open learning program analyzed. Although these enrollment factors interact with one another in varying degrees depending on individual circumstances, for the purposes of this explanation they have been set forth as distinct areas of inquiry. It must be recognized that there are unique life circumstances beyond the control of SUN and UMA that prohibit an individual from enrolling. However, certain factors influencing enrollment are within the control of SUN/UMA and should be viewed as priority policy issues in the near future.

It is thus recommended that now is the appropriate time for SUN, in cooperation with the UMA Office of Research and Evaluation, to undertake a study of factors influencing enrollment. In the author's opinion, those factors that should be addressed first are cost, promotion and course needs. Continuation of these investigations should result in some thoughtful policy decisions for future enrollment activities.